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Ndondondwane: a preliminary report on an Early Iron Age site on the lower Tugela River

by

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ABSTRACT

This important mid-eighth century site provides detailed information on the Early Iron Age economy and diet. It is the first Natal site to produce evidence of above-ground structures, large ceramic sculpture and ivory working. The pottery represents a new ceramic expression fitting between Msuluzi Confluence and Ntshekane.

INTRODUCTION

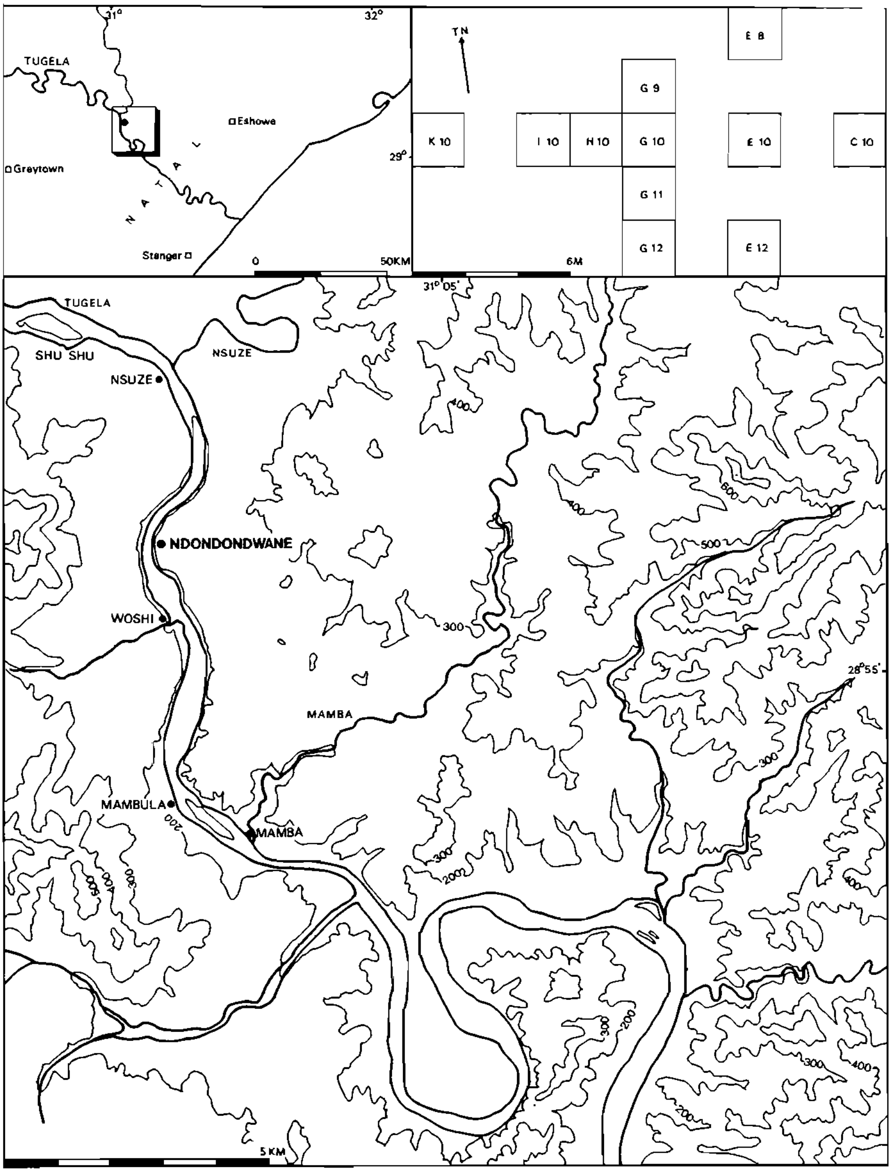
While ploughing an old field in 1977 Mr C. Woolmore, the storekeeper at Ndondondwane, came upon a rich patch of Iron Age remains including bone, pottery and fragments of ceramic sculpture. As part of the project on Early Iron Age settlement and subsistence patterns in the Tugela Basin I was looking for a site with ashy deposits that contained bone and might also include carbonised plant remains. The fragments of sculpture were of additional interest while the pottery was rather different from, although clearly related to, other EIA assemblages we had excavated. Ndondondwane was also uneroded, an unusual characteristic for the local EIA, and it therefore offered the possibility of yielding more information on built settlement pattern than we had yet found.

Excavations were carried out over a three week period in April 1978 with a team averaging 17 people. The site more than fulfilled our expectations and though only a small portion, amounting to 40 square metres, was completed, this produced a considerable quantity of cultural material and food waste.

More recently the site has come under the threat of flooding in a proposed new dam. Because of this threat, further excavations are in progress to obtain larger samples and to find out more about the settlement pattern. These are being conducted under the direction of J. Loubser with funding by the Bureau of Natural Resources, KwaZulu Government. Since the current work will eventually provide far more information than the original fieldwork, the present paper will not aim to cover the site in great detail, but merely to provide a preliminary report.

THE SITE

In 1931 considerable interest was aroused when Smith, Havemann and Macadam made collections from several Iron Age sites in this part of the Tugela Valley including Shu Shu, Nsuze and Mamba (Natal Museum collections) (Schofield 1948). However, the sites were not recorded and it was only after further exploration by ourselves and Loubser's team that some have been relocated (Fig. 1).


31°
32°
TUGELA
Eshowe
Greytown
NATAL
29°
Stanger
0
50KM
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H 10
G 10
E 10
C 10
G 11
G 12
E 12
6M
31°05'
TUGELA
SHU SHU
NSUZE
NSUZE
NDONDONDWANE
WOSHI
400
600
400
500
300
28°55'
MAMBA
MAMBULA
MAMBA
200
300
200
500
400
300
300
200
300
400
200
400
5KM

Fig. 1. Map of Ndondondwane and neighbouring EIA sites and plan of excavation.

Ndondondwane itself, however, does not seem to have been known prior to 1977, as mentioned above.

All sites conform to the Natal EIA site location model (Maggs 1980*a*, Maggs in press) being situated on patches of deep colluvial soil, beside rivers, in savanna–bushveld vegetation. The deeply incised Tugela Valley in this area is in rain-shadow from the Kranskop plateau and receives an average of only 800 mm of rain per annum. This, together with relatively high temperatures, makes it a dry area where even today the African cultigen Sorghum is more successful than the exotic maize.

Ndondondwane is the name of a traditional ford on the Tugela a few hundred metres downstream of the site, where the water flows over a broad, shallow rapid. Such natural crossing points may also have had an influence on site location, for the next such ford downstream, between Mambula and Mamba (Fig. 1), is also close to EIA sites.

When we first visited it, the Ndondondwane site was a ploughed field in which a slight mound about 25 m in diameter, of a rather greyer colour than the surrounding soil, was visible. It was on and around this mound that the greatest concentration of surface material was apparent and therefore our excavations were limited to it.

EXCAVATION

Because the surface indications gave only a vague idea of what lay deeper down, we started excavating in a chequerboard pattern of 2 m squares in order to determine the richest part of the mound. Alternate squares C, G, E and I in the 10 row were excavated first, which established that the richest area was from G to I. The area was then opened out laterally in the E and G rows (Fig. 2). Stratigraphy consisted of an upper plough soil, brown in colour which we called Layer 1, over Layer 2 which was midden material generally redder in colour but

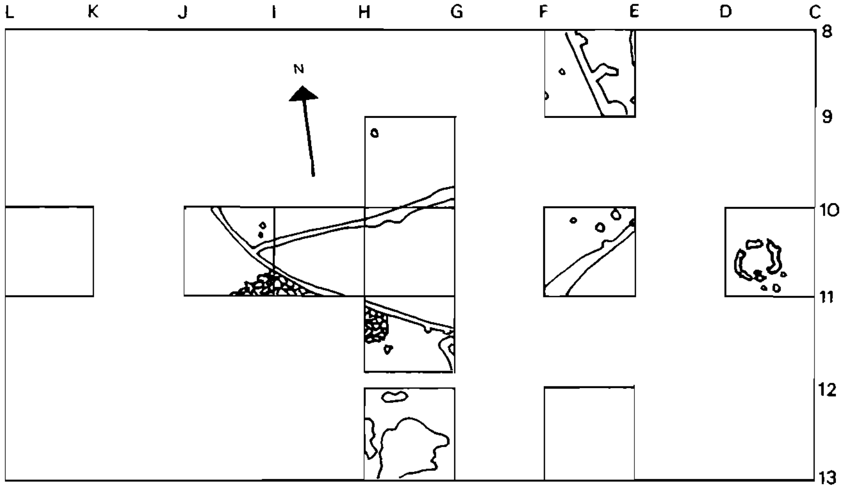

Fig. 2. Plan of the excavations showing channels.

also containing grey and darker lenses. At its most complex, in Square H10, Layer 2 contained up to four superimposed lenses (Fig. 3), generally dipping towards the south-west. However, most lenses had little lateral extent and appeared to be minor episodes in the accumulation of the midden; although there were some differences in content, for example the redder lens in G9, G10 and H10 was particularly rich in bone as well as ivory chips.

Beneath the midden a natural soil level was reached. This was particularly hard and smooth in the south-eastern part of G10, suggesting that there was a hut floor or other deliberately hardened surface here prior to the midden accumulation. After this surface had been brushed clean a number of features were revealed (Fig. 2). Numerous small holes varying from a few, to about 40 cm in diameter appeared to be post holes though many, especially of the smaller ones, could have been animal burrows; indeed one still had its resident mouse.

More significant were a number of channels, filled with midden material but originally about 25 cm deep and 20 cm wide (Fig. 4). In several places they showed broader and sometimes deeper circular areas at intervals of 50–70 cm apart (Fig. 5), and in one or two of these holes a soft material resembling decayed wood was noted. It seems that these trenches supported stockades constructed of stout poles spaced apart with lighter material, perhaps reeds or thin poles in between. No complete plans could be reconstructed but the excavated portions suggested an irregularly shaped enclosure about 9 m in diameter, cut by a subdividing wall (Fig. 2).

The position of the stockades themselves was only visible in the channels cut into natural soil, making it uncertain as to their age relative to the midden layers. However, there was additional evidence from the southern line of stockade in squares G11, H10 and I10. Immediately to the south of the channel in these squares were piles of stones reaching from the base of Layer 2 upwards close to its upper surface (Fig. 3). Seen in plan (Fig. 6) it is clear that these stones must have been piled against the outside of the stockade. Furthermore in Square H10 a line of stones in the upper portion of Layer 2 follows closely the inside edge of the channel (compare Figs 3 and 6) indicating that they were placed against the stockade. The Grey Midden and Dark Midden occurred only in the south-western corner of H10 neighbouring I10, that is outside the stockade (Fig. 3) while the Middle Grey Midden occurs only from the inner line of stones northwards (Fig. 6). It is therefore clear that the southern line of stockade was in place during most of, if not the whole of the accumulation of Layer 2. The relative age of the northern line of stockade is, however, not so clear. It does not seem to have influenced the overlying midden deposits to any great extent and it may therefore have been a shorter term feature.

In Square C10 an irregular ring of blackened and hardened earth about 90 cm in diameter was uncovered at a depth of 30–40 cm in an area which was otherwise rather poor in remains. This could have been the base of a fireplace, alternatively it could be a ring of hardened soil around a burnt tree stump.

Irregular hollows filled with soft, light brown soil in Square G12 could have been borrow pits or the depression left by an uprooted tree.

The excavated area was clearly a dumping place but the fact that some of it was

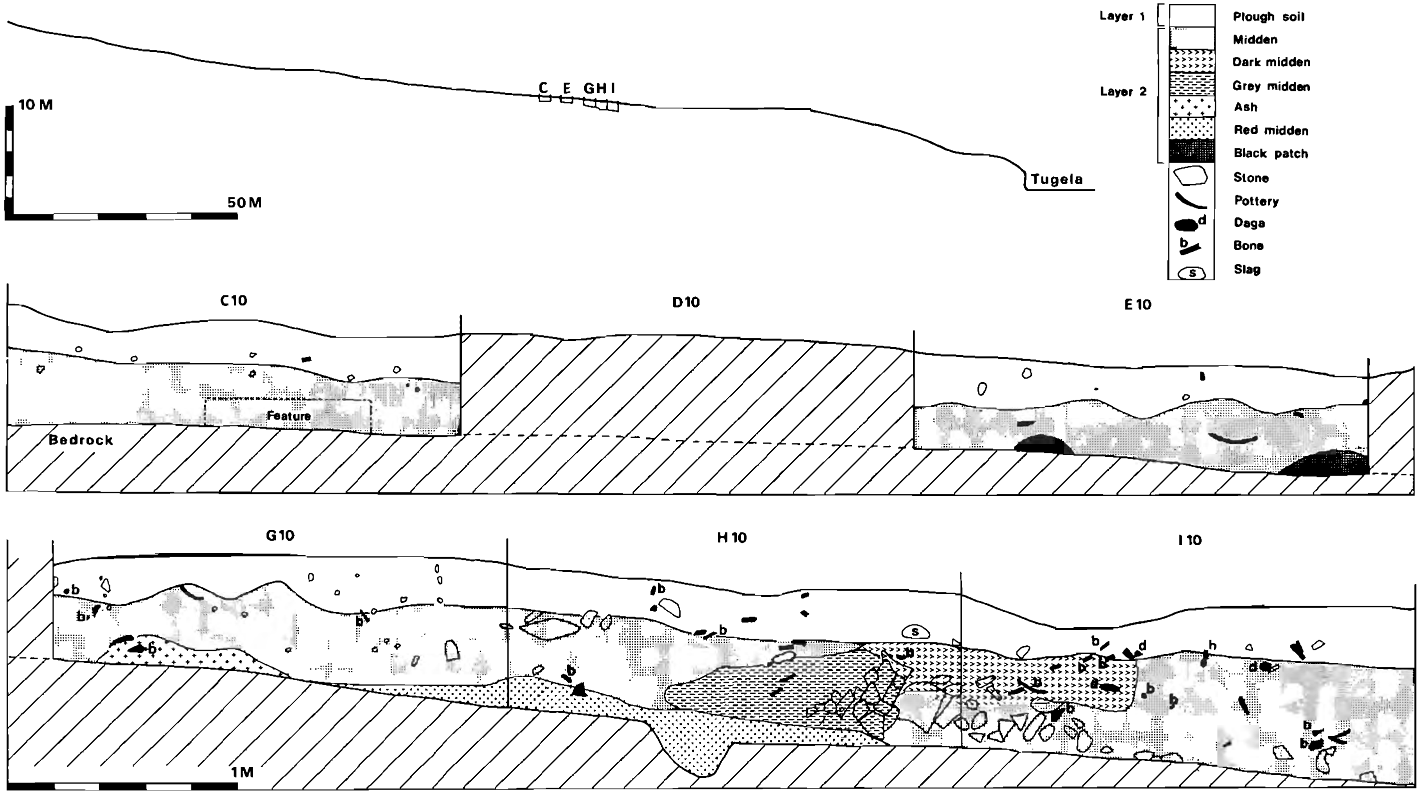
10 M
50M
C E GHI
Tugela
Layer 1
Layer 2
Plough soil
Midden
Dark midden
Grey midden
Ash
Red midden
Black patch
Stone
Pottery
Daga
Bone
Slag
C10
D10
E10
Feature
Bedrock
G10
H10
I10
1M

Fig. 3. Profile through the site and section from C11 to J11 (for position on plan see Fig. 2).

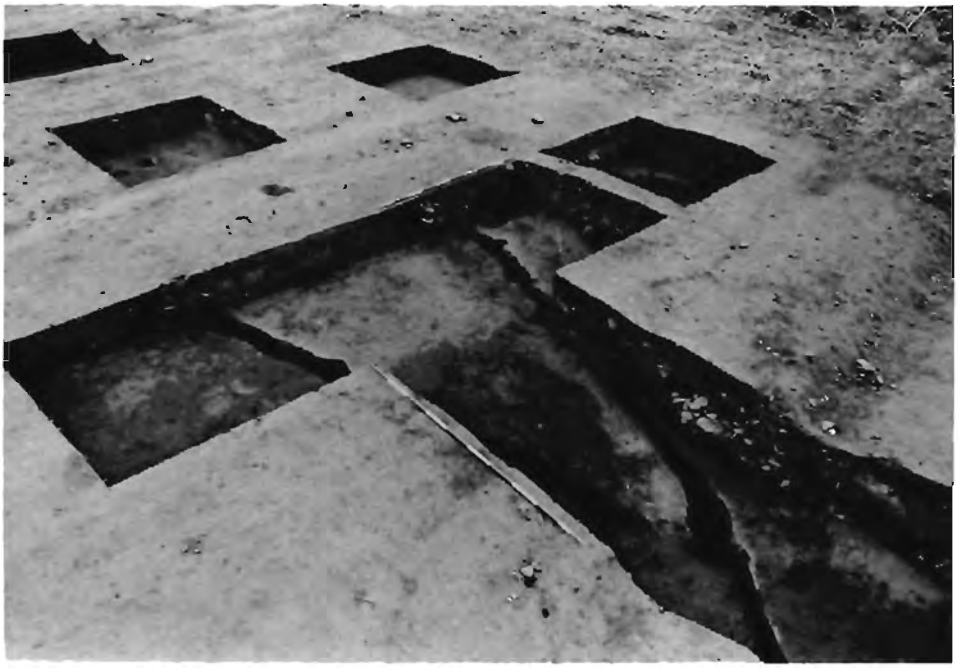

Fig. 4. View of completed excavations with channels.

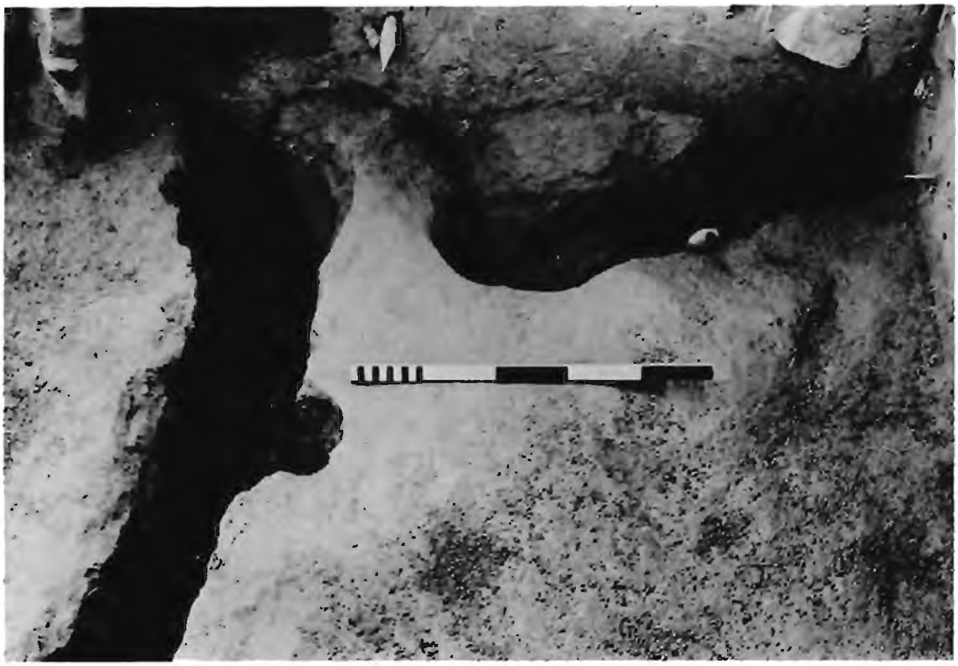

Fig. 5. Detail of channels showing two possible postholes in the left hand one.

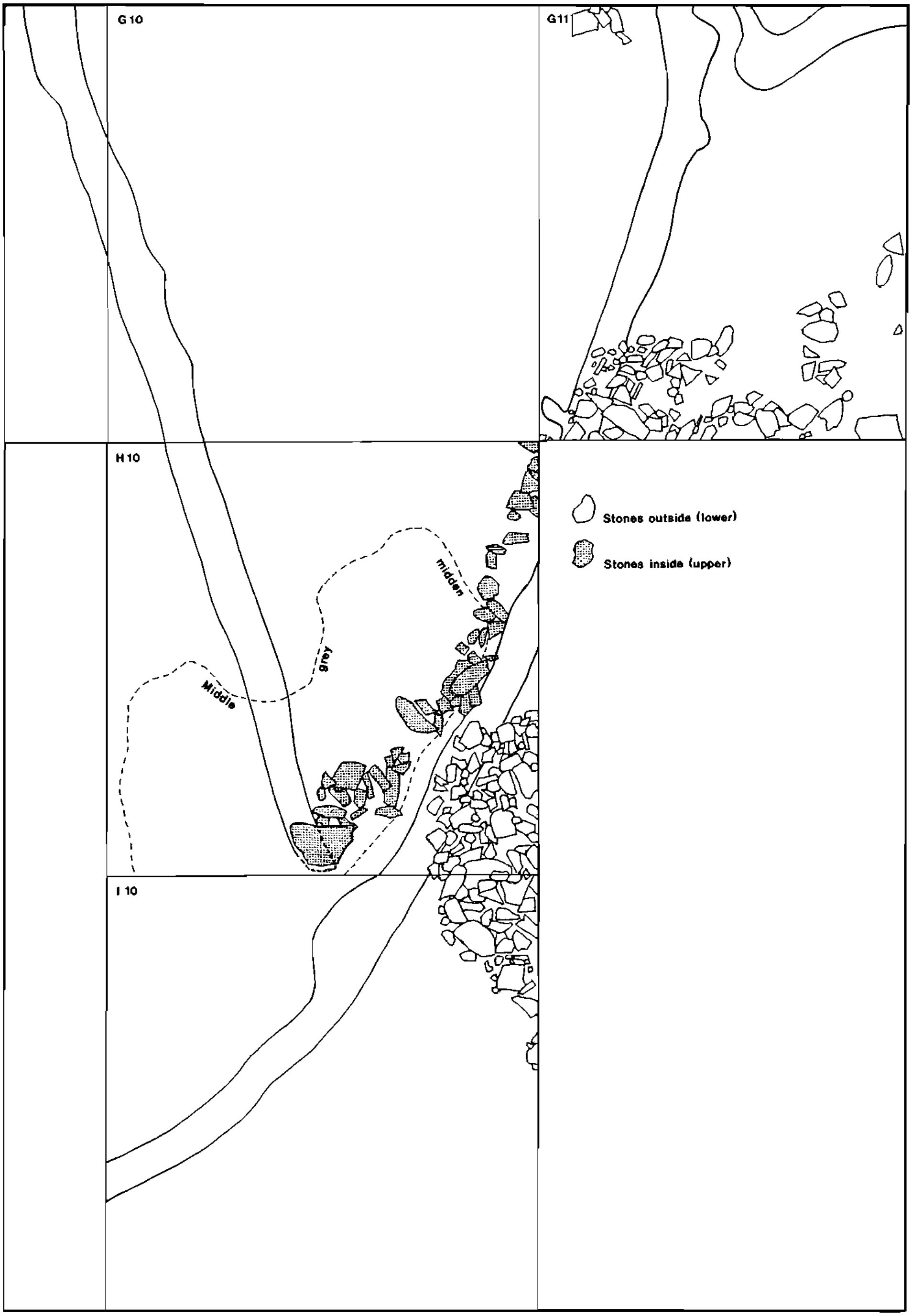
G10
G11
H10
I 10
Stones outside (lower)
Stones inside (upper)
Middle
grey
midden

Fig. 6. Detailed plan showing positions of stones inside and outside the southern line of stockade as well as of the Middle Grey Midden. This shows that the stockade must have been in position when they were deposited.

within a stockaded enclosure gives it additional significance. The enclosure does not appear to have been a stock pen but perhaps rather a screened-off area for special activities such as ivory working.

Dating

Two charcoal samples were submitted to J. C. Vogel of the CSIR for processing, with the following results:

Pta-2388	1220 ± 50 (A.D. 730)
Pta-2389	1190 ± 50 (A.D. 760)

Pta-2388 was collected from the west side of Square G11 at a depth of 50–60 cm. This was among and below the pile of stones outside the stockade and it would date an early part of the accumulation here.

Pta-2389 was from the east side of Square I10 at a depth of 40–50 cm where there was a rich concentration of bone. This was in the Middle Grey Lens which was particularly rich in bone. This lens was about midway down Layer 2 (Fig. 6) with red midden above and below it, thus about half-way through the accumulation within the stockade. Therefore this sample is likely to have been a little later than the previous one though statistically they are in effect contemporary. The whole accumulation probably did not take more than a few decades.

THE FINDS

Pottery

The Ndondondwane assemblage is of particular interest as it represents a variant of previously described material. It is related to Msuluzi Confluence, yet has sufficient differences to merit its own typological subdivision. So far it is by far the largest excavated sample of this kind of pottery, but it is clearly close to material from Pits 6 and 13B at Magogo (Maggs & Ward 1984) both in time and typology. The consistency of the assemblage confirms the impression gained from the lack of significant stratigraphy that the site represents a single occupation.

The following pottery description makes use of the system used on other Early Iron Age sites within the present project (Maggs 1980*b*, 1980*c*, 1984, Maggs & Michael 1976). The description is based on 43 reasonably complete pots and 46 bowls. The combinations of attributes are shown in Table 1.

Characteristics of the pots

Shape

1. Pot with relatively straight, everted neck and well-defined point of inflection.
2. Pot with curved, everted neck.
44. Pot with upright neck.
3. Lip profile rounded.
4. Lip profile flattened.
5. Lip profile tapered.
47. Lip emphasis.

Position of decoration

8. Whole of neck.
9. Upper neck.
32. Lower neck.
11. Just below (attached to) body/neck junction.
12. On body (not attached to body/neck junction).

Decoration motifs—continuous

14. Band of several horizontal grooves.
15. Band of oblique hatching.
16. Two or more bands of oblique hatching.
34. Band or bands of even cross-hatching.
17. Band of horizontal and oblique or vertical cross-hatching.
24. Band of alternate parallelograms, hatched.
19. Band of interlocking triangles, hatched.
37. Bands of opposed hatching *without* intervening groove.
38. Bands of opposed hatching *with* intervening groove.
39. Cord effect, where a band is thickened to stand out in relief.

Decoration motifs—discontinuous

40. Vertical quadrilaterals hatched or unhatched.
41. Applied decoration—bosses or strips.

TABLE 1

Matrix of pot attributes.

The column and row numbers refer to the list of attributes.
The number at the end of each row is the total for each attribute.

	1	2	44	3	4	5	47	8	9	32	11	14	15	16	34	17	24	19	37	38	39	40	41	Totals
1	—																							2
2	—	—																						28
44	—	—	—																					12
3	2	15	8	—																				25
4	—	8	2	—	—																			11
5	—	1	—	—	—	—																		1
47	—	—	1	—	1	—	—																	1
8	—	3	4	4	2	—	—	—																8
9	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—															1
32	2	22	8	18	9	1	1	—	—	—														33
11	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—													1
14	1	2	1	2	—	—	—	1	—	3	1	—												4
15	—	8	2	7	3	—	—	2	—	9	—	1	—											11
16	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—										1
34	—	13	6	10	5	1	—	3	1	15	—	—	1	—	—									19
17	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—								1
24	—	2	2	2	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—							4
19	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—						1
37	—	3	3	3	1	—	1	1	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—					5
38	—	2	1	3	1	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—				3
39	2	—	1	2	1	—	1	—	—	3	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—			3
40	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—		1
41	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	1

The data show clearly that the most characteristic pots of the site have one or, less often, two or three bands of decoration on the lower half of the neck ending at the body–neck junction, with a broad undecorated band above it (Fig. 7)—a feature that is much less common at Msuluzi Confluence and similar sites. Most common motifs are hatching (Fig. 7:1,2) and cross-hatching (Fig. 8:1–7) while cord effect where the bands stand out in relief (Fig. 7:1,4,5) is relatively more common here than at other periods. However, the multiple bands covering most of the neck so typical of Msuluzi Confluence do also occur here (Fig. 9:4,5). Rare examples of applied strips occur as interruptions across the horizontal bands of decoration.

The linear decoration, though consisting of grooves, is in most cases not achieved by a dragging action but by a series of impressions along the same line. Sometimes the overlapping of these impressions is visible (Figs 7:3 8:1 9:6 10:1,2). In this way a smoother groove is achieved. In fact this technique seems to have been used quite widely in the Natal Early Iron Age, perhaps more often than dragging. Body decoration is rare but does exist in the form of ladders, pendant triangles and various shaped panels. Burnish is more common than on earlier sites and occurs on pots both as red ochre, black and uncoloured burnish, though it is still rarer than at the succeeding Ntshekane site (Maggs & Michael 1976).

In shape the pots are closer to Msuluzi Confluence than to Ntshekane but there is a difference in that there is a significant number of upright necks (Figs 9:6 10:4), although most are still curved everted. While there is a wide range in size, shape varies relatively little (eg. compare Fig. 10:1,2). One atypical sherd (Fig. 9:7) appears to come from a spherical pot.

Taphonomically the sherds were relatively scattered and mixed within the site which is not surprising considering the midden nature of the deposit. It was however possible to do a considerable amount of reconstruction of some vessels and it became clear that several had had their bottoms deliberately broken off in a fairly regular line prior to discard, a feature so characteristic of the Early Iron Age. In addition there is one definite case where most of the neck had been removed and the remaining part—just the lower band of decoration—had been ground to form a relatively smooth rim (Fig. 10:7). Bowls are described separately from pots as in previous papers, the attribute combinations are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Matrix of bowl attributes.

The column and row numbers refer to the list of attributes.
The number at the end of each row is the total for each attribute.

	2	3	4	20	5	6	7	18	17	10	Totals
2	—										9
3	—	—									13
4	—	—	—								14
20	—	—	—	—							13
5	8	7	9	7	—						30
6	—	5	4	6	—	—					14
7	1	1	1	—	—	—	—				3
18	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—			1
17	5	1	4	—	9	—	1	—	—		10
10	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1

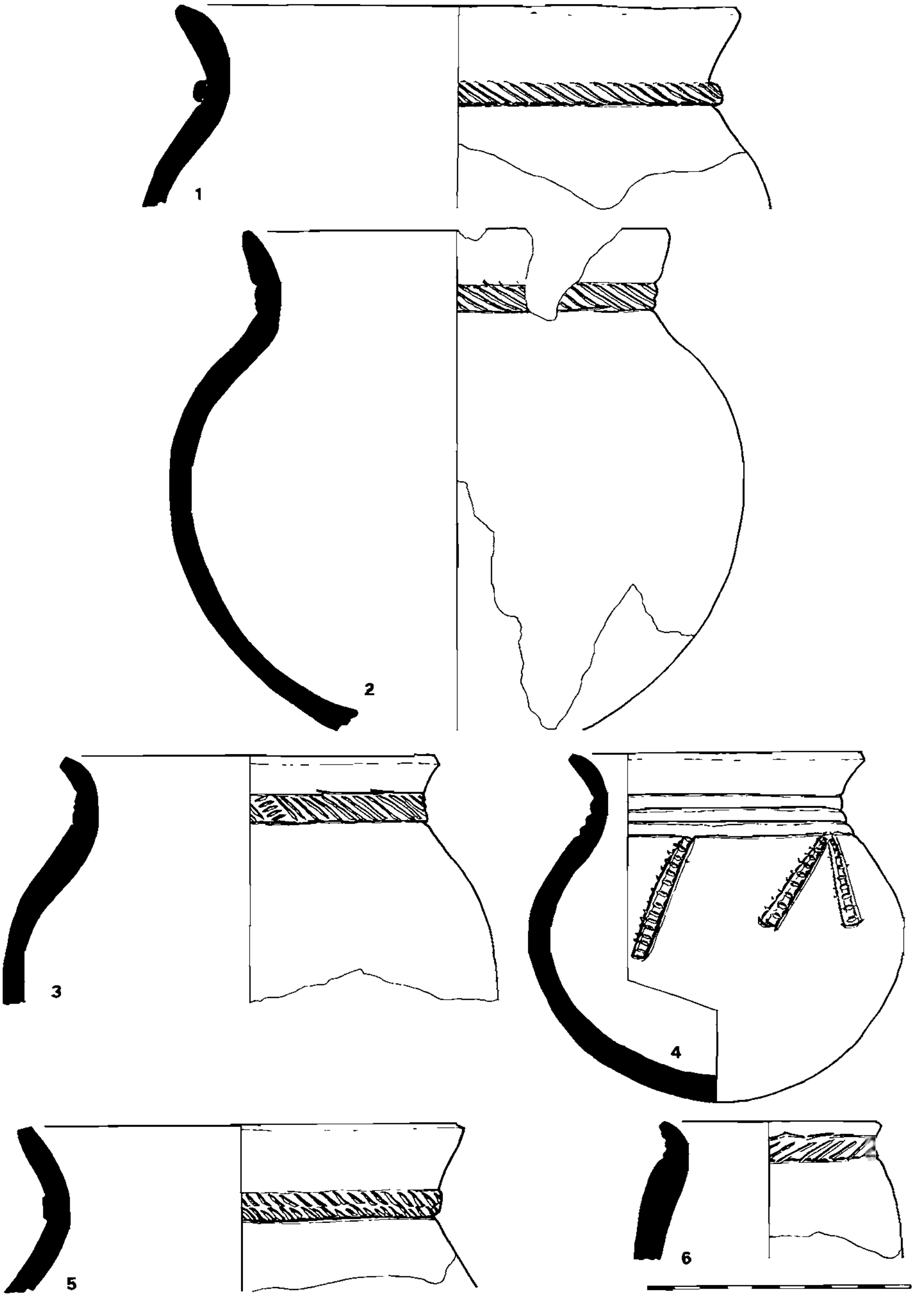

Fig. 7. Typical pots except for 6. Note rare body decoration on 4.

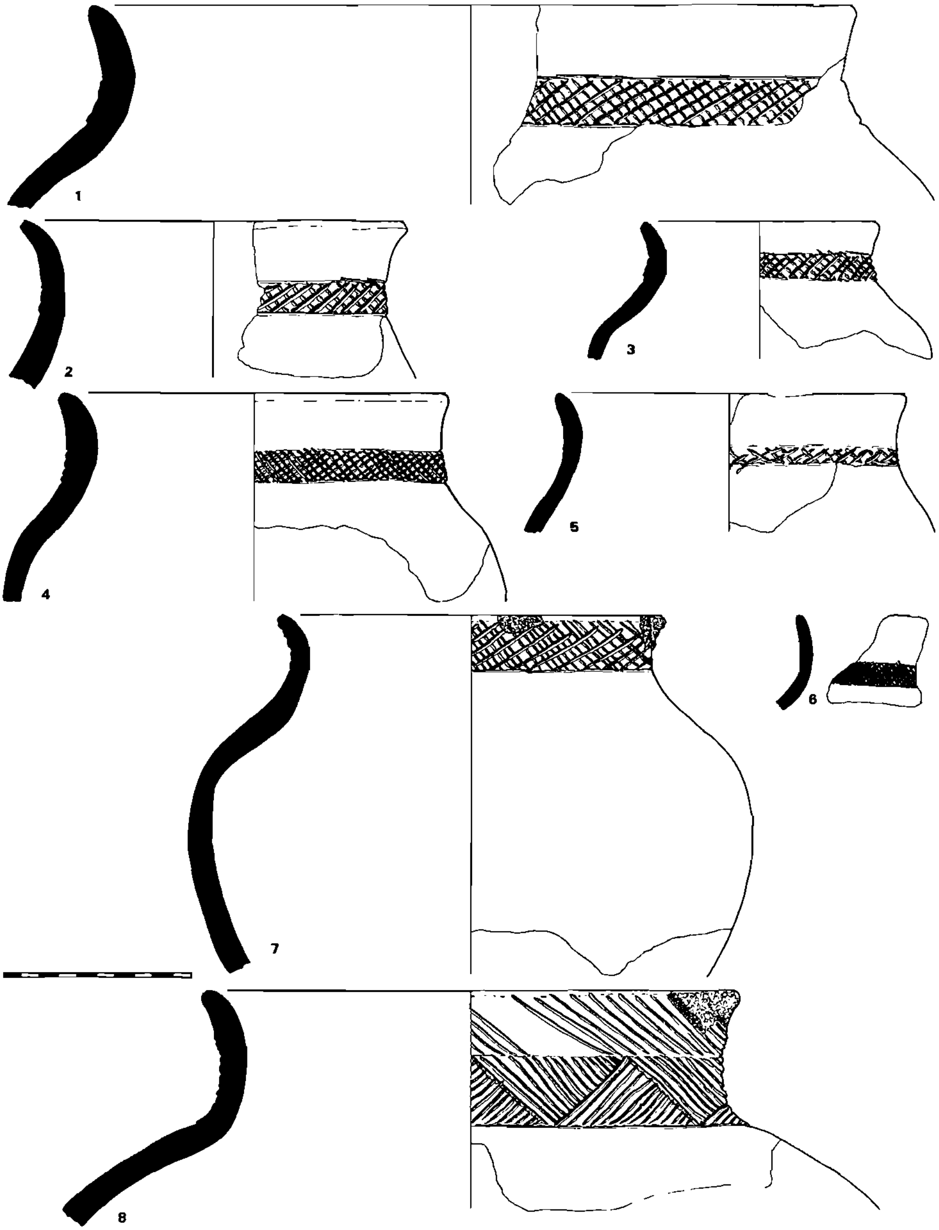

Fig. 8. Typical pots.

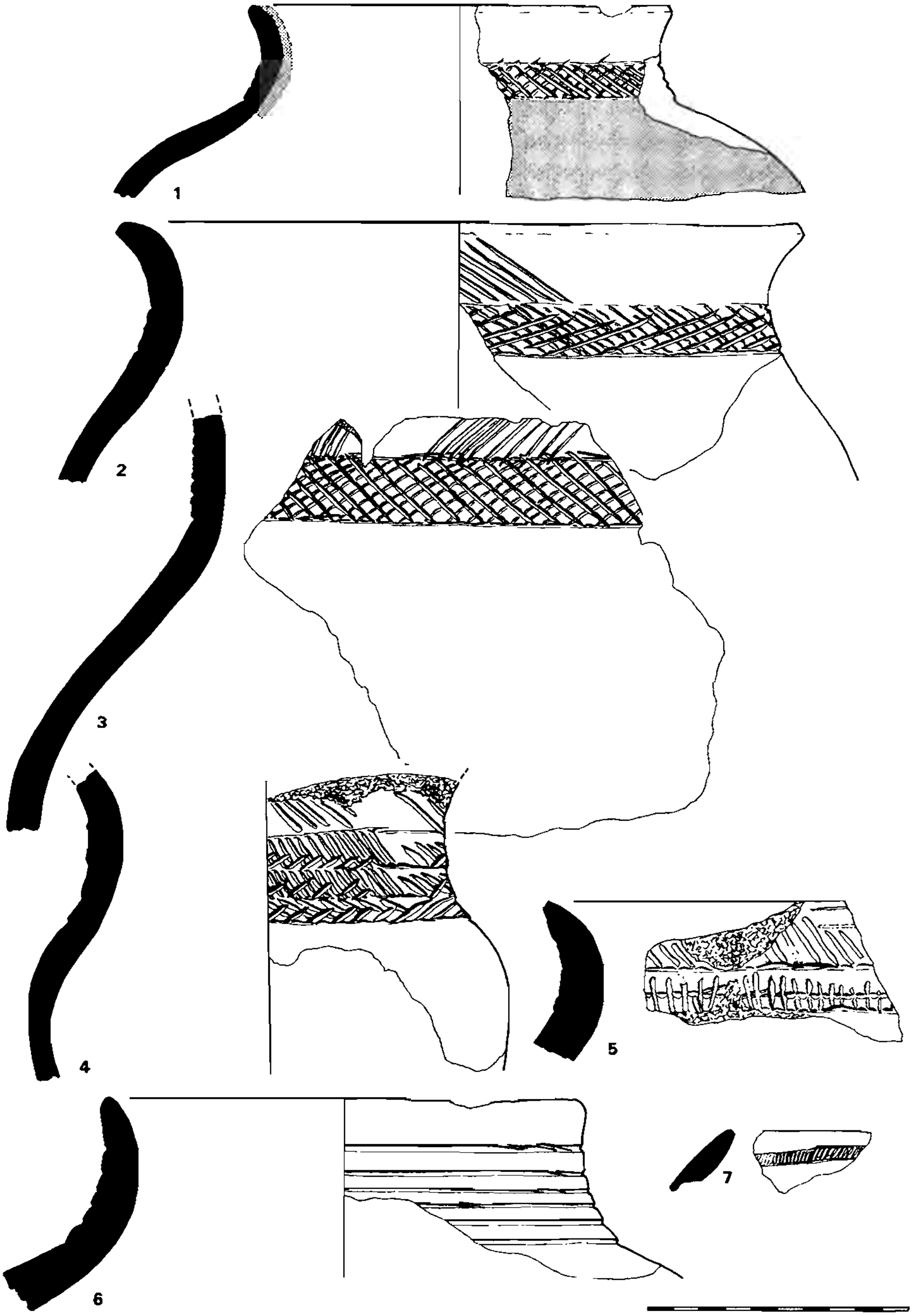

Fig. 9. Less common pots. 1 has red burnish, 2–5 have multiple bands similar to pots from Msuluzi, 6 has upright neck, 7 seems to be from a globular pot.

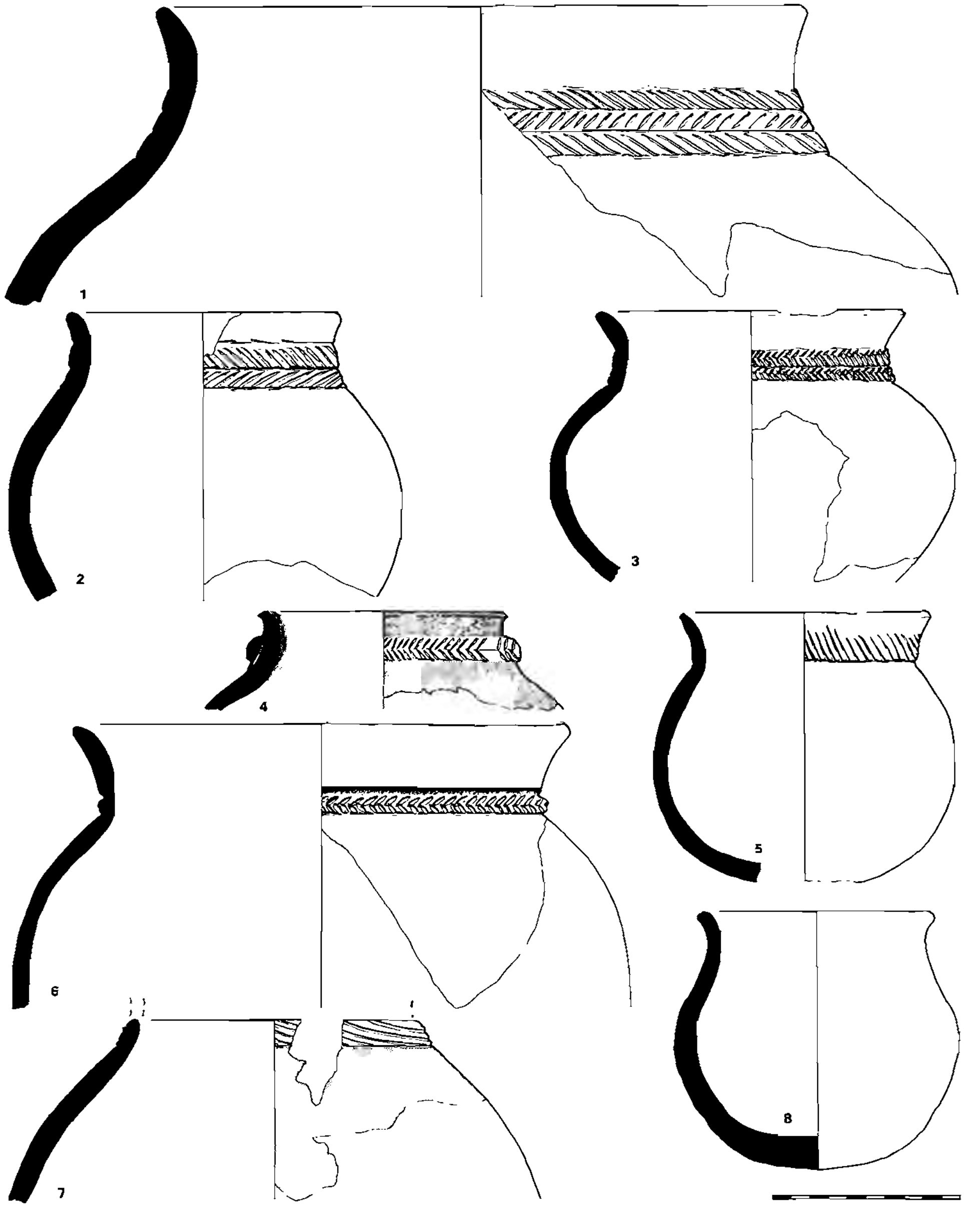

Fig. 10. Pots with one or more bands of decoration, 8 undecorated. Note cord effect on 4 & 6. 7 has upper neck broken off and edge smoothed off to form rim. 4 & 7 have red burnish.

Characteristics of the bowls

Shape

2. Subcarinated, not thickened.
3. Hemispherical.
4. Subspherical.
20. Widemouthed.
5. Lip profile rounded.
6. Lip profile flattened.
7. Lip profile tapered.
18. Lip emphasis.

Decoration

17. Burnish including red or black or uncoloured.
10. Horizontal row or rows of individual impressions.

Among the bowls there is considerable variety both in shape and size. They vary from large openmouthed (Fig. 12:2,3) and subspherical (Fig. 12:1) to smaller examples of both these shapes as well as subcarinated examples (Fig. 11:4,7,9,13). With one exception they are undecorated but some of the smaller subspherical and subcarinated ones have a red burnish (Fig. 11:5,9,10). The small widemouthed bowl (Fig. 12:7) is of interest in that it resembles a well-defined type that occurs on historic Zulu sites.

There are also a few examples of very small, crudely made vessels which are probably toy pots (Fig. 11:1–3).

Ceramic sculpture

Ndondondwane is important as the only Natal site to have produced pieces from large and therefore hollow ceramic sculpture. However, the pieces are fragmentary and reconstruction of the original form is not yet possible. Pieces include large eyes, horns and crocodile-like jaws (Fig. 13) on a scale which suggests that the complete objects were larger than any of the Lydenburg heads (Inskeep & Maggs 1975, Maggs & Davidson 1981). Smaller, solidly modelled figurines (Fig. 13 centre) were also present as is the case at other EIA sites in Natal. Current work will augment our knowledge of this aspect of the occupation.

Worked bone and ivory

Bone artefacts were recorded including several that appear to be typical Late Stone Age arrow points and link shafts (Fig. 14). Similar artefacts have been found on other EIA sites and it has been suggested (Maggs 1980*b*) that LSA hunting technology was applied from these settlements.

Other bone items include a variety of shaped, polished and pierced tools and fragments of ornaments. Ivory remains consist essentially of large numbers of waste chips and some fragments from bangles. This material has been described by Voigt & Von den Driesch (1984).

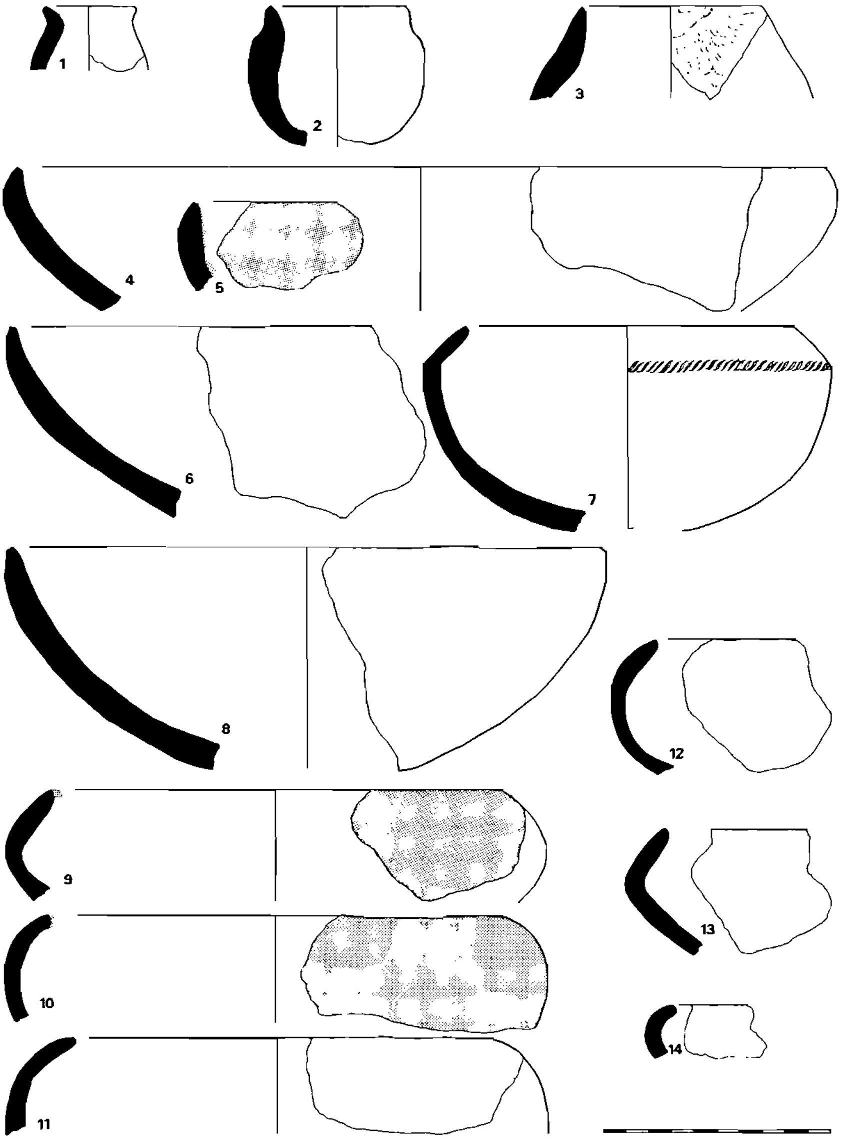

Fig. 11. 1–3 are probably toy pots, the rest are bowls including subcarinated—4,7,9 & 13; widemouthed—5,6 & 8; subspherical—10,11,12 & 14. 7 was the only decorated bowl. 5,9 & 10 have red burnish.

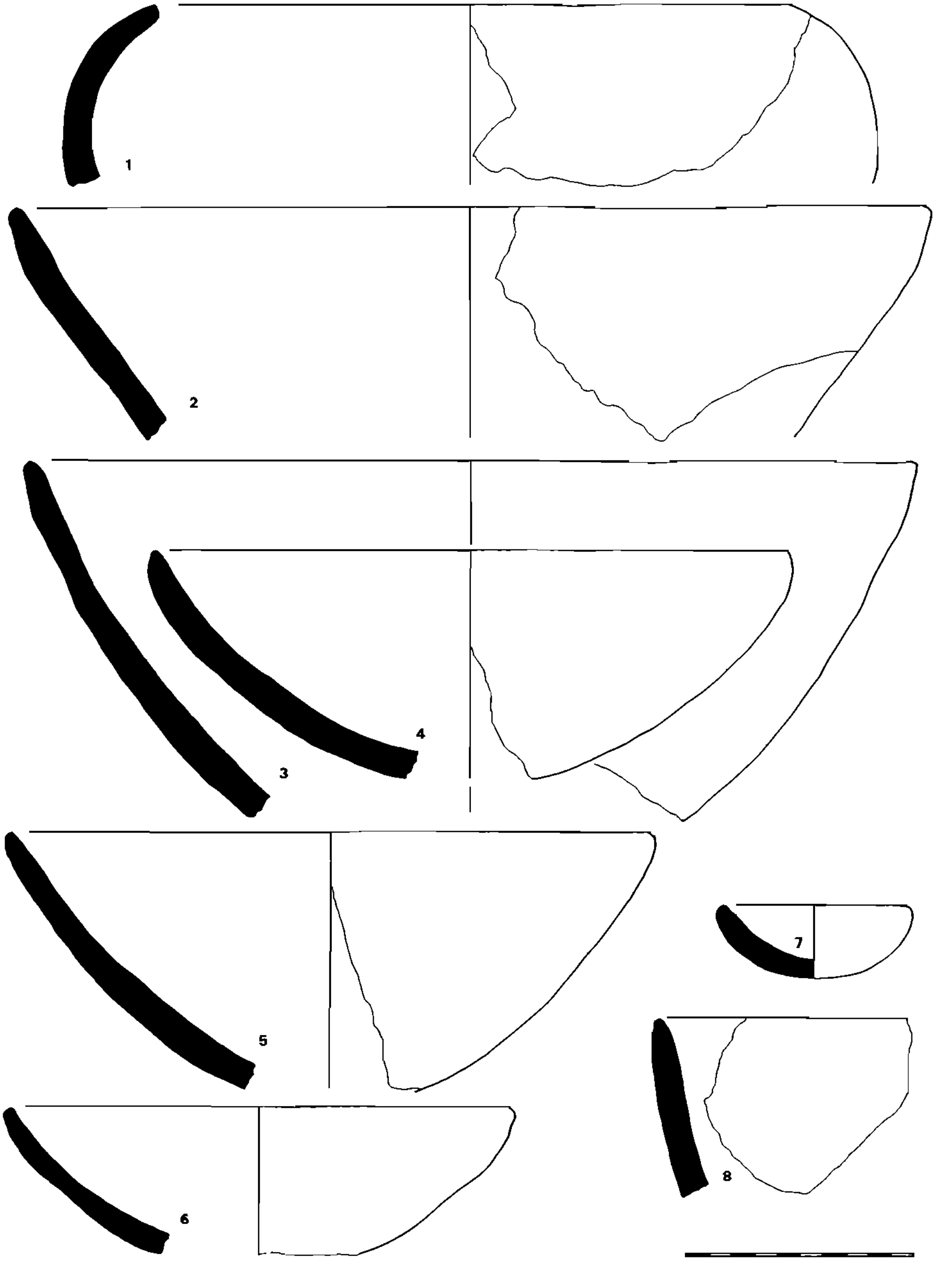

Fig. 12. Bowls including widemouthed—2,3–6 & 8; small widemouthed—7; subspherical—1.

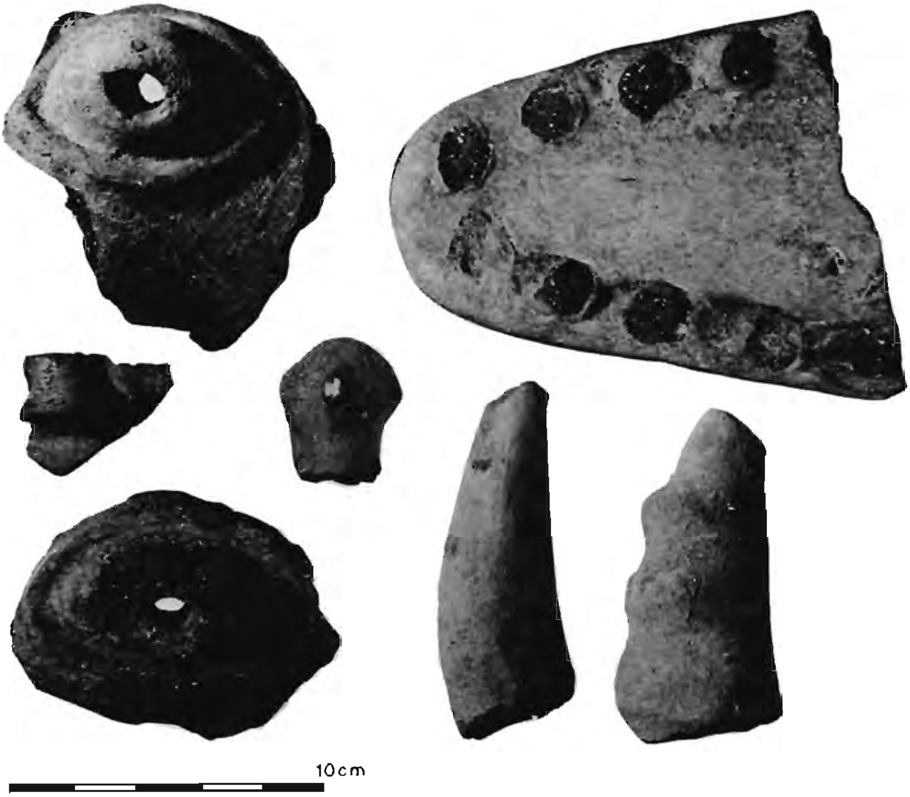

Fig. 13. Fragments of ceramic sculpture include eyes, horns, a crocodile-like jaw, a small human head and a decorative nose-like projection (centre left).

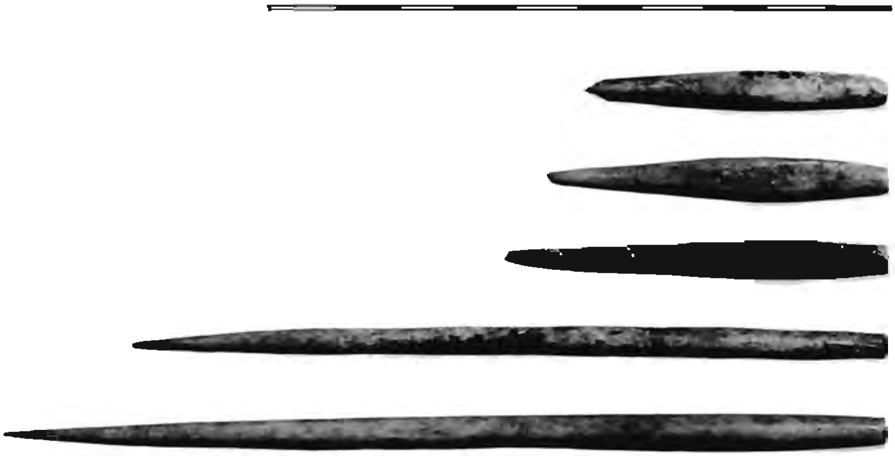

Fig. 14. Bone arrowheads and link shafts of Late Stone Age pattern.

Worked shell

A total of 496 shell disc beads was recovered, 439 being of *Metachatina kraussi*, 56 of ostrich egg and 1 of *Unio*. Diameters are given in Table 3 which shows that there is very little difference between the beads made of different raw materials. However, *Metachatina* shell is a frequent find, indicating that it was present in the local environment, whereas only one or two pieces of unworked ostrich eggshell were recovered and it is clear that the thick bushveld environment would not have been a suitable habitat for these birds. Ostrich eggshell beads must therefore have been introduced from some distance away; they do not seem to have been made on site for none broken in the course of manufacture were found although there were several such of *Metachatina*.

TABLE 3

Diameters of shell disc beads in mm.

	No.	Mean	Standard deviation	Range
Metachatina	439	6,3	1,3	3–9
Ostrich egg........	56	6,5	1,4	4–9
Unio	1	7	—	—

The only other shell artefact was a scoop made out of *Metachatina*. Numerous *Metachatina* and a few *Unio* (fresh water mussel) fragments were found in the midden. Both are edible. The *Metachatina* was probably collected in summer and the *Unio* from the mud of the river in winter. Marine shells were also recovered including one *Fissurella natalensis* and two *Patella* sp.

Metal items

A small (4 × 2 mm) copper bead and a piece of iron rolled into a cylinder 13 mm long and 5 mm in diameter were recovered from Layer 2 of G11. In Layer 1 there were also several modern pieces of metal.

Stone artefacts

A variety of stone was recovered including quartz, granite, agate, micaceous granite, shale, sandstone, soapstone, iron ore and calcite. The latter occurs nearby and may have been used as a flux in iron-smelting.

Two complete upper grindstones and three fragments each of the typical EIA upper and lower grindstones were excavated. Other items include a dimpled hammerstone and three other hammerstones, 13 hornfels flakes and 12 other flaked pieces.

Floral remains

This section falls into three parts dealing with *Sclerocarya caffra* (Marula) nuts which are readily identified by the non-botanist, other seed from flotation, and charcoal, respectively.

Carbonised *Sclerocarya* nuts were a common find being recovered during excavation, sieving and flotation. The fact that so many are carbonised suggests that the kernels were extracted after the stones were roasted. Weights are given in Table 4; no attempt has been made to calculate the minimum amount of food represented, although this could readily be done by counting the number of plugs, each of which represents a cell within the stone. Table 4 shows that the largest quantities came from close to and perhaps mainly outside the stockade, though smaller numbers do come from squares entirely within this enclosure. Ndondondwane is situated within *Spirostachys* Valley Woodland bordering on *Sclerocarya–Acacia* Tree Veld (Edwards 1967), thus this tree is likely to have been very common at the time of the EIA occupation. It seems to have contributed a significant amount to the diet though no doubt the hardness of its nuts is partly responsible for the preservation of such a quanity.

TABLE 4

Weight of *Sclerocarya* (Marula) nuts.

Square	Weight in gm
G9,2	10,75
G10,2	0,25
G11,2	26,0
G12,2	6,5
H10,2	13,0
I10,2	48,5

Other seeds were recovered by flotation and wet sieving of the sunken material within the flotation unit. These were identified by E. J. du Plessis of the Division of Plant and Seed Control, Department of Agriculture. They are listed in Table 5 along with comments on their possible uses and provenance. Many attributions are tentative or only to a generic or broader level because of poor preservation.

Of greatest interest is the identification of carbonised *Pennisetum typhoides* (bulrush millet) which was evidently a staple EIA grain crop, having been identified from Silver Leaves (Klapwijk 1973) and Magogo (Maggs & Ward 1984) as well. This is the only cultigen on the list and today it is grown only in northern KwaZulu and further afield.

Many of the wild plants have edible leaves or fruits while others have traditional medico-magical properties. It therefore seems likely that some do reflect deliberate collection. However, caution is needed here since it is not certain how these remains came to be within the deposit. Some of the seeds are from plants that do not appear to have had any particular use, while several are exotic weeds. Five of the latter, *Argemone* sp, c.f. *Sinapis arvensis*, *Chenopodium* sp., *Echium* sp. and c.f. *Sanguisorba* are considered to be relatively recent imports into southern Africa, in which case they imply contamination of the flotation samples (O. Hilliard pers. comm.) Minor biotic disturbance by burrowing animals and by roots has clearly taken place in the midden and there was a very heavy growth of weeds on the site at the time of the excavations. One of the flotation samples was taken from a hole in the base of Square C10 which was considered a possible posthole (recorded as C10, H in Table 5). It is of

TABLE 5

Floral material identified from flotation samples.
Identifications by E. J. du Plessis

Identification	Description	Possible uses and comments	Provenance
Acacia sp.	Thorn trees	Very common	G9,2; G11,1
Acanthospermum hispedum	Weed	Exotic	G11,2
Amaranthus sp.	Weeds of cultivation	Leaves are a staple	C10,H
Argemone sp.	Poisonous weed	Exotic	G9,2; G11,2; H10,2
Blepharis sp.	? *B. natalensis* shrublet	Dominant on erosion	H10,2
Brassicaceae c.f. *Sinapis arvensis*	Weed	Exotic	G9,2
Cadaba sp.	? *C. natalensis* shrub	Apparently not eaten	C10,H; G10,2; G11,2; I10,2
Capparidaceae c.f. *Capparis* sp.	Shrubs	Magico-medical properties	I10,2
Celastraceae	Numerous shrubs/tree	—	G11,2
Chenopodium sp.	Weeds of cultivation	Exotic; some have edible leaves; medicinal properties	C10,H
Commelina sp. c.f. *Benghalensis*	Herb	Leaves edible	G11,2
Commelina crispa	Herb	—	G11,2
Convulvulus sp.	Numerous herbs	—	G9,2; G11,2
c.f. *Dovyalis* sp.	Shrubs/trees eg. Kei-apple	All have edible fruit	G12,2; H10,2
c.f. *Drypetes* sp.	Shrubs/trees	Edible fruit	G9,2
Echium sp.	Weed	Exotic	G9,2
Eleusine indica	Goose grass	Pioneer in disturbed areas	C10,H
Euphorbia spp.	Succulent shrubs/trees	Very common, poisonous	G9,2; G11,2; I10,2
Fabaceae c.f. *Desmodium* sp.	Herbs	—	G9,2
Galenia sp.	Small shrubs	? Medicinal	C10,H
Galium sp.	Scrambling herbs	Roots medicinal, leaves edible	H10,2
Grewia sp.	Shrubs	Many have edible fruits	G9,2; G10; G11,2; H10,2
Hyptis sp.	—	—	G9,2
Ipomoea sp.	Convolvulous	Various medicinal properties	G9,2
c.f. *Kedrostis* sp.	Wild cucurbits	Roots medicinal, leaves edible	G9,2
Lamiaceae c.f. *Salvia* sp.	Herbs of sage family	Medicinal	H10,2
Lantana sp.	Shrubs	Edible fruits	H10,2
c.f. *Ligustrum* sp.	Shrubs	Exotic	G10,2
Mollugo sp.	Small herbs	—	G11,2
c.f. *Olea* sp.	Wild olive is a dominant tree	Fruit and leaves edible	G9,2
Panicum sp.	Grasses	—	C10,H
c.f. *Parinari* sp.	? *P. curatellifolia*—Mobola plum	Edible fruit	G12,2
Pennisetum typhoides	Bulrush millet	Important grain crop	G11,2
c.f. *Potamogeton* sp.	Water weed	? Edible	G9,2
Rhus sp.	Shrubs	Some have edible fruits	G9,2
Rosaceae c.f. *Sanguisorba*	Herbs	Exotic, not recorded from Natal	G9,2
c.f. *Rubiaceae*	Numerous shrubs/trees	—	G12,2
Sapindaceae c.f. *Pappea* sp.	? *P. capensis*—tree	Edible fruit	G9,2; G12,1
Setaria sp.	Grasses	—	C10,4
Sterculiaceae	Numerous shrubs/trees	—	G9,2
c.f. *Tribulus* sp.	Herb, 'Duiweltjie'	Multi-thorned seed, disturbed or overgrazed areas	G11,2
Urochloa sp.	Grasses	Typical of disturbed areas	C10,H; G10,2; H10,2
Vangueria sp.	Shrubs/trees	Fruits edible	G11,2
Zygophyllaceae c.f. *Zygophyllum*	Herbs	Some are poisonous	H10,2

interest that this sample included apparently uncarbonised seeds of eight species which include two weeds of cultivation, one of which is probably a recent introduction, and two or more other species typical of disturbed areas. It seems probable that this and many other such holes are animal burrows.

Charcoal identifications were carried out by L. O. van Schalkwyk under the supervision of H. J. Deacon and A. Scholtz of the University of Stellenbosch. The aim was to determine the range of species used as firewood and also to obtain some idea of what tree species were growing in the neighbourhood of the site. Samples were submitted from two squares, G9 and H10, and Van Schalkwyk (1981) reports as follows:

H10 Four species were identified

(i) *Rhus* sp., specifically undetermined
(ii) *Sclerocarya caffra*
(iii) *Acacia karoo*
(iv) *Acacia burkei*, some doubt exists as to the exact species but diagnostic features key out best to this species among the Acacia species listed by Kromhout.

G9 Two species were identified

(i) *Olea* sp., probably *africana*
(ii) *Sclerocarya caffra*

These five species suggest that a considerable range of wood was used for fuel. With the exception of *Acacia burkei*, where the identification is indeed uncertain, these trees are all common in the *Spirostachys* Valley Woodland (Edwards 1967). *Olea, Rhus* and *Sclerocarya* are also identified from seed (Table 5) all of which are edible. It is perhaps surprising that *Sclerocarya* appears in both samples as fuel since it was clearly also an important source of food. Its food value could have led to the conservation of this tree as is the case in many parts of southern Africa today. However, the samples are inadequate for any quantitative assessment of the fuel used.

CONCLUSION

The excavations were limited to only a portion of the site which had served as a dump and also contained a stockade structure that may have been used for specific activities such as ivory working. The fragmentary figurines may have served some religious purpose that took place in this part of the site. With these exceptions the material recovered suggests normal EIA village activities.

The faunal remains (Voigt & Von den Driesch 1984) represent the largest EIA assemblage from Natal. They confirm results from other sites and show that the villagers were largely dependent on cattle and sheep for their meat although they did possess some goats. Dogs are the only other definitely identified domestic animals though chickens are a possibility. Hunting seems to have been of little significance with the exception of the hippopotamus which may have been required for ivory as well as meat.

Cultivation was clearly important and among the crops was bulrush millet. A wide variety of wild plant foods in addition to the Marula nuts was probably gathered.

The occupation, including the previously undescribed ceramic expression is firmly dated to the middle part of the eighth century.

Further work at Ndondondwane and neighbouring sites can be expected to give us a much fuller picture of life during this period in the lower Tugela Basin.

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